Reviews

***Revolutionary Histories: Transatlantic Cultural Nationalism, 1775–1815*. Ed. W. M. Verhoeven. New York: Palgrave. 2002. xi, 258 pp. $69.95.**

***Fragments of Union: Making Connections in Scottish and American Writing*. By Susan Manning. New York: Palgrave. 2002. viii, 339 pp. $69.95.**

***The Devil & Doctor Dwight: Satire & Theology in the Early American Republic*. By Colin Wells. Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press. 2002. x, 254 pp. Cloth, $49.95; paper, $19.95.**

The past two decades of early American studies have seen the application of powerful new transatlantic approaches to analyzing the construction of the early United States. These approaches have recently felt pressure from coeval developments in cultural studies and postcolonial theory that envision more complex relationships between subject and nation formation. These three books grapple with this challenge in strikingly different ways, showing both the promise of and problems with a transnational American cultural history.

Revolutionary Histories is a diverse, if at times uneven, collection of essays, reflecting the multifarious approaches that first popularized transatlantic studies. W. M. Verhoeven alludes to this variety in his introduction, highlighting the "valuable degree of methodological self-consciousness" characterizing the collection (3). On display here is not simple historical or literary sleuthing but an attempt to define a new position for transatlantic studies, one to which it has been pushed by recent cultural and social criticism, and a location from which it can redefine its relevance.

Many of the essays call attention to their own methods, implicitly linking Revolutionary-era debates about historiography with current debates over historicity in transatlantic studies. Other essays revise past transatlantic investigations by looking at racial representation and print circulation. Carla Mulford's contribution, "Benjamin Franklin, Native Americans, and the Commerce of Civility," tracks the rhetorical positioning of Native Americans on both sides of the Atlantic within the discourse of civility that situated them as always in the service of competing national interests. Similarly, Robert

Lawson-Peebles studies the act of blushing in England and the United States, destabilizing essentialist notions of nation and positioning a biological act within the production of ideas of nationhood.

Not every essay represents a compelling revision of transatlantic studies. Some shuttle quickly from one side of the Atlantic to the other without adequately describing the usefulness of such a comparison; only a few move beyond a binary transatlantic approach to analyses involving three or more cultures. Still, the volume's disciplinary breadth and theoretical variety suggest potentially productive methods for future study, modeled by the history of the compilation itself: the essays are products of a transatlantic conference, jointly organized by the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill and the University of Gröningen in the Netherlands.

Susan Manning begins *Fragments of Union* by declaring a departure from the historicism of studies like *Revolutionary Histories*: in place of traditional influence-based methods, she "works through more associative and analogical models of comparison initially derived from the structuring principles of the Scottish and American texts themselves" (4). Manning delineates a set of interpretive axes for reading the transatlantic deployment of plots and tropes of union, fragmentation, federation, incorporation, and boundary formation. Chapter 1, perhaps the strongest, explores the effects on Anglo-Atlantic philosophical discourse of the political struggle over models of union in the wake of the 1707 unification of Scotland and England. The options appeared to be federation—the maintenance of ties, and hence gaps, which required more theorizing about how to convince people to maintain those ties, and which promised an unsettling perpetuation of instability—or assimilation, the dissolution of particulars. Manning demonstrates, through readings of Hume's *Treatise of Human Nature* and its respondents (including, most significantly, Thomas Reid), how languages of politics, selfhood, and grammar drew upon common struggles with incorporation, how "an embedded political analogy within the vocabulary of union and fragmentation" structured the expression of ideas about identity (34–35). Subsequent chapters explore the significance of union-fragmentation tropes for the imagination of self, the figuring of union through temporality and sentimentality, landscape writing and the grammar of boundary drawing, and the long-term effects of the theorization of fragmentation in the nineteenth-century United States.

Fragments of Union would have benefited from adhering to Roland Barthes's observation that a little formalism leads you away from history in interesting ways and a lot of formalism leads you back again. Manning's Enlightenment-inspired, ahistorical analysis unfortunately never returns to history. While some sections present sophisticated meditations on the diasporic persistence of the terms of high cultural debate about language and consciousness and their relationship with political formations, Manning's devotion to Humean method results in her study's showing the same weaknesses that plagued Scottish Enlightenment models of analogy. As history has taught us, analogy

can hide as much as it can reveal, and its erasure of causality introduces an arbitrariness that may seem callous in the study of colonial domination and exploitation. Manning admits that "there are . . . many possible determinants beside[s] nationality of individual alienation from an 'official' collective identity," but she does not discuss how the transnational categories of race, class, or gender inflect the notion of "union" and separation in profound ways (77).

Colin Wells's *The Devil & Doctor Dwight* is a structural and methodological contrast to Manning's text. Not merely a single-author study—of Congregational minister and Yale President Timothy Dwight—this is a single-poem study, of Dwight's *The Triumph of Infidelity* (1788). A satire, the poem has stayed beyond the reach of modern audiences precisely because of the question of causality. Wells unpacks the poem's dense theological, ideological, and political allusions and includes, as an appendix, his own edited and annotated edition. The American response to the problematics of union emerges here as an engagement of influences from Augustan poetry to Enlightenment science (Scottish, French, English and German) to backwoods American theology, framed by the international rhetoric of satire.

Wells argues convincingly that the root warning of Dwight's satire of "infidelity" indicts our "tendency to want to believe only the best about ourselves," to seek easy rationalizations of our behavior instead of accepting the sustained labor of negotiating the world's challenging moral topography (181). Dwight reasserts the impossibility of transcending secular time, against his contemporaries' increasing sense that historical rupture had left humans in control of their own perfection. In Wells's reading, Dwight's poem becomes evidence of the fluid but self-conscious exchanges of ideological appeals among Enlightenment rationalism and science, theology, atheism, and political theory. Wells has a powerful sense of the intellectual landscape of the eighteenth-century United States; he articulates how "politics and religion figure largely as transient and intertranslatable vocabularies or discourses" so clearly that the reader gains, beyond an understanding of Dwight's poem, a richer sense of the intellectual revolution in which Dwight participated (10).

Hints that Dwight's poetry can tell us about more than the interpenetrations of rational, theological, and political discourse occasionally shine through Wells's focus on intellectual tradition. Class issues permeate the poem. Given that its dominant trope, the "triumph," or procession, of the Devil through the New World, calls attention to the carnivalesque and to public celebration, it's possible that Dwight is fusing intellectual and public performative traditions in his construction of authority. This and other unexplored avenues are perhaps shortcomings of the narrow focus, but they are minor, considering how this study enables future work on Dwight's poem.

All three books call attention to the relationship between critical method and its expressive form, but with variable results. Manning's text exploits the strengths of associative analysis but slights the causal connections that the contributors to *Revolutionary Histories* so persuasively engage. Wells's

approach allows for an intricately composed picture of transatlantic literary and political formations, but its narrow focus on a single text risks limiting its portability. All of these texts attempt to lay the groundwork for future approaches, offering methodological models that call attention to the unanswered questions facing students of transatlantic culture.

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American Literary Realism, Critical Theory, and Intellectual Prestige, 1880–1995. **By Phillip Barrish. New York: Cambridge Univ. Press. 2001. x, 213 pp. $54.95.**

The Culture Concept: Writing and Difference in the Age of Realism. **By Michael A. Elliott. Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press. 2002. xxviii, 239 pp. Cloth, $60.95; paper, $21.95.**

Regional Fictions: Culture and Identity in Nineteenth-Century American Literature. **By Stephanie Foote. Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press. 2001. vi, 218 pp. Cloth, $55.00; paper, $24.95.**

These three studies, each the first book of a promising scholar, offer interesting innovations in the tradition of realism studies laid out by Amy Kaplan's *The Social Construction of American Realism* (1988) and Richard Brodhead's *Cultures of Letters* (1993). Kaplan and Brodhead connect realism closely with the interests and concerns of dominant political and social groupings, but both emphasize the complexity and contingency of that dominance as well as the intricacy of its literary effects. Following these examples but advancing significantly into new materials and questions, Barrish, Elliott, and Foote all presume that realist fiction is involved in important social or political contests (variously defined) but home in on the overdeterminations, contradictions, and displacements of the literary texts they examine.

In Barrish's *American Literary Realism, Critical Theory, and Intellectual Prestige*, the key contests are "[i]nternecine struggles over cultural status among different middle-class fractions" (4). Barrish's central project is the tracing of a range of textual moments in realist texts organized around a display of tastes—usually a competition between tastes. By emulating Pierre Bourdieu's attention to the complexities of taste without pretending to be able to chart these tastes securely on a social map, Barrish can note the many and flexible ways in which characters and historical persons invoke the rhetorical move of being "realer than thou" (129). His commentary on these moments is wonderfully illuminating, as when he identifies the bid for superiority embodied in a "'meta-taste' [as] a taste for tastes" (30) in Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham* and when he marks the peculiar kind of distinction